
FIELDSTONE
Community Group Inc.

Creating
The Fieldstone Historic District
Randallstown, Maryland

A Report for the Landmarks Preservation Commission
Prepared by: Susan Carr-Spiccioli and David Bryan
The Fieldstone Community Group
December 14,2000

The Fieldstone Historic District

Fieldstone is a community of about 80 households, situated along Liberty Road in the heart of Randallstown. Liberty Road, Church Lane and Blair Road roughly border the actual historic district, although there is a newer section of our community on the south side of Liberty Road, known as Fieldstone 2.

History of Randallstown

Randallstown can be loosely defined as that part of the County along Liberty Road between Old Court Road and Marriotsville Road. Its history dates back to 1727, when Christofer Randall, an English settler moved from his property in Anne Arundel County and purchased 109 $\frac{3}{4}$ acres of land from Lord Baltimore in a section of the county then known as Soldier's Delight Hundred. It was Christofer Randall who gave his name to the town though it was his grandson who farmed the property near Randalistown called Fell's Forest. About 1740 more people realized the value of this land beyond what was then known as Court Road, and many began to take up large tracts of land. These people could not get to Baltimore because of bad roads and impassable ridges, so in 1742 the General Assembly empowered Christofer Randall and others to receive subscriptions for land for a church. St. Thomas' in the Garrison Forest was built, and still stands today.ⁱ

The town of Randallstown grew slowly along the Liberty Pike, the main road from Baltimore to Libertytown. It consisted of a cluster of buildings along the pike itself, a few general stores, blacksmith shops, taverns, homes and farmhouses.

The Fieldstone Community

In 1843, a young German immigrant, J. Adam Klohr, purchased 26 acres of land where Liberty Road, Church Lane and McDonough Roads now rest, and built his home. It is in this modest clapboard farmhouse, which still stands that the story of the Fieldstone Community begins. Adam Klohr gave his home to his son, J. Henry Klohr. In 1879, Seymour Ruff, a young journeyman stonemason came to board with the Klohr's while he was learning his trade. He fell in love with Henry's daughter Wilhelmina, married her and made Randallstown his home. In 1885, he founded his own stone masonry company and worked as a craftsman and contractor. In 1891, he purchased land across from his father-in-law and built his own home. It was the first stone home in Randallstown and stands today as the hallmark of the Fieldstone Community that Ruff would build.ⁱⁱ

Liberty Road was a toll road until 1910, with the tollgate and toll-keepers house being located opposite what is now the Randallstown Community Building. When the toll was abandoned in 1910, there was a great celebration, with a barbeque, and a burning of the tollgate itself. The road was made a State road, and the toll of three cents per horse no longer applied. The community was understandably happy; there no longer being a gate across the road, with the requirement to arouse the keeper out of bed if one was traveling at night.

By the early 1900's, Seymour's eldest son, John Klohr Ruff joined his firm and Seymour Ruff and Sons, Inc., Masonry Contractors was born. By this time, the Ruff's were pillars in the developing community of Randallstown, as can be seen by a number of examples of their work over the next few decades.

The original community building was a lodge hall built by the Knights of Pythias in 1880. It was a tall, unadorned three-story structure and was the largest building in the area. It had classrooms, an auditorium with a stage and the lodge's meeting rooms. A building society met at night once or twice a month, as there were no banks closer than Baltimore or possibly Pikesville. The auditorium was used for group meetings, church suppers and even dances. This building, through the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century was the center of life for the surrounding area.

It was at this building that John K. Ruff, his sister Elizabeth and younger brother Seymour had gone to school. When John K. was older and a partner in his father's masonry contracting business, he became involved in the decision to build the current Randallstown school. The old hall was in poor shape, and the classrooms rat infested. John K.'s dedication to his hometown was evident when, with the school commission undecided on where to build a new school in the area, he proposed that if the school were kept in Randallstown, he would build it at cost. The commission quickly and gratefully accepted. The new school was built in 1908, is still in use and currently undergoing a \$6.0 million expansion and renovation.

Two other examples of the Ruff's involvement in the local community occurred in 1921 and 1924. It was in 1921 that the community raised \$13,500 by popular subscription to install electricity, and then in 1924, another \$32,500 was raised, again by popular subscription for a trackless trolley system. It ran from Gwynn Oak Junction to a barn a few miles beyond Randallstown, every hour during most of the day; every half hour from six to nine in the morning, and from four to seven o'clock in the evening.

The culmination of their work in Randallstown occurred in 1927, when the new Community Building was constructed. It cost \$100,000 to build, a sum backed by the Knights of Pythias. That debt was paid back by the community by groups and clubs giving dinners, fairs, dances and a booth run annually at the Timonium Fair. The new Building contained a drugstore, an A&P store, the Post Office, a Barber Shop, bowling alleys, an auditorium, lodge rooms and a bank. This building quickly became the center of community life for many miles around, and for a good part of the 20 century.

Through the 1920's, Seymour Ruff and Sons, Inc. finished acquiring the acreage where the Fieldstone Community stands today. They designed roads and lots; working around the existing farmhouses, building their custom built stone homes. The community became one of the earliest examples of a planned development in the region. Where all the other homes in the area relied on well water, the Ruff's put in one of the first central well and pump system to serve the whole community.

Most of the homes used stone as the primary building material, with some of painted brick. Seymour Ruff and Sons had become prolific builders in the region through the 1920's and 30's, with over 50 churches, public buildings, libraries, college buildings, and notably the Towson Post Office and right next door, the extensions to the old Baltimore County Courthouse. Some of these examples can be seen in the publication "A Story in Stone" that we had copied and distributed at the October hearing regarding the preliminary listing of the Randallstown Community Building.ⁱⁱⁱ

Over the years since then, Fieldstone has seen some of the gaps between the Ruff stone homes filled in with brick Cape Cods and Ranchers, even now most of those are approaching the 50 year old mark.

There is very little left of the old Randallstown, and that, which does exist, is mainly isolated buildings such as the Choate House, New Tavern, and the Jean House. Fieldstone represents an intact, complete community from the earlier history of our town.

We would like to finish up this presentation with a quote from some literature that we found during our research. We have distributed a very interesting brochure from the 1920's showing some of Seymour Ruff and Sons residential work. In it are examples of their work found in the region; Guilford, Homeland, Green Spring Valley, Dumbarton, to name a few. Please note on the right centerfold page an example of the new development of Fieldstone, a home that is on what is now known as Briarstone, and currently owned by our neighbors, Karen Soltis and Darlene Woods, here with us tonight. Also please note on the third page an example of financing for one of these homes, costing \$10,000.

The back cover has a quote that sums up our community:

"A house built of stone is an everlasting pleasure and a joy forever." ^{iv}

ⁱ Ruff, Mary Grimm, "Randallstown", 1939

ⁱⁱCarr-Spiccioli, Susan, "Preserving The Randallstown Community Building", October 12, 2000.

ⁱⁱⁱ"A Story in Stone", 1929, a publication by Seymour Ruff and Sons, Inc., exhibiting their work.

^{iv}"Fine Stone Homes Everywhere", 1929, a brochure by Seymour Ruff and Sons, Inc., exhibiting their residential work.